



Abandoned hulls show the price Atlantic Canada fishermen pay when too many fish are taken by international fleets outside the 200-mile limit.

In 1986 Spain and Portugal joined the EC. NAFO incorporated the traditional Spanish and Portuguese shares into the EC's shares, increasing the EC's quotas accordingly. However, in that year, the EC abruptly ended its compliance with NAFO's quotas, taking advantage of a legal technicality in the NAFO convention to reject them and to set its own quotas, significantly higher than NAFO levels.

The EC's catches suddenly soared to unprecedented levels:

- In 1986, the EC fleet caught 172 000 tonnes (t). This was more than seven times higher than the total of quotas allotted by NAFO.
- In 1987, EC vessels caught 141 000 t, more than six times the NAFO quotas.
- By 1988, such catches were already weakening the fishing stocks, and EC boats were only able to catch 66 000 t.
- Rather than heeding this warning, in 1989 the EC continued on its surprising course, setting its unilateral quotas 12 times higher than those adopted by NAFO.

▪ In a major fishing area designated 3L, to the east of Newfoundland, NAFO has placed a moratorium on fishing for cod, in effect a prohibition on fishing. The EC disregards the moratorium, and between 1986 and 1988 it took 116 454 t.

NAFO MEMBERS

- Bulgaria**
- Canada**
- Cuba**
- Denmark in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland**
- European Community**
- German Democratic Republic**
- Iceland**
- Japan**
- Norway**
- Poland**
- Romania**
- U.S.S.R.**

▪ The 1989 NAFO Scientific Council report, accepted by all NAFO members, reveals worrisome declines in the fish stocks. The cod stock biomass in the large, southern (3NO) region has declined 33 per cent between 1986 and 1988. The American plaice stock is near the lowest level ever observed, and the spawning stock of the yellowtail flounder is also at an extremely low level.

▪ The stocks of two major flatfish species are declining so rapidly that NAFO has had to reduce its total quotas for NAFO members by about 60 per cent in only four years: from 75 000 t in 1986 to 29 900 t for 1990.

▪ In 1986 alone, the EC fished the two latter stocks at 27 times the EC's traditional NAFO quotas. Is it surprising that these stocks are now in trouble?

The serious reduction in the overall fish resource has occurred despite the relatively small proportion of the total fish stock that migrates into NAFO's Regulatory Zones. This small proportion, which extends beyond the 200-mile limit, is fished so intensively outside the limit that the effects are felt inside the Canadian limit.

Any breeder knows it's economic suicide to kill off the young stocks that support a business. Yet, EC vessels fish without restraint in vital nursery areas of the Grand Banks outside Canada's 200-mile limit. Young fish that have not reached spawning age represent almost half the EC's flatfish catch in NAFO nursery areas. By contrast they make up only 2.3 per cent of Canada's annual catches.

Small, young fish bring a lower price at market, but they are critically important in regenerating fish stocks. Therefore, stripping them away inflicts the twin injuries of making catches commercially less valuable and endangering the future of an entire industry.

To make the overfishing picture even bleaker, vessels from several non-NAFO countries fish heavily in NAFO waters. This is a picture of an industry sailing willfully into danger, destroying its own future for short-term gain.

Flatfish such as these, being hauled onto the deck of a trawler, are among the main victims in the overfishing tragedy.

